

Information for Social Change

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Editorial

Welcome to issue 17 of *Information for Social Change*. In common with many other LIS journals we have now become an electronic publication. This means that we will no longer be producing hard copies of ISC. If you want a hard copy go to our website at www.libr.org/ISC/ and download a copy to print out.

This issue is in three parts. Part one features articles by John Pateman (*Developing a Needs Based Library Service*) and Martyn Lowe (*Activism and Archivist*). These are intended to stir up interest and debate so please send us your views.

Part two continues our theme of discussing the impact of globalization and privatization on library services. Ruth Rikowski has become our resident expert on this subject and she has made three further valuable contributions to this debate in this issue : *Globalisation, libraries and information; Library Privatisation: fact or fiction?; and Still at your service? GATS, privatization and public services in the UK*. We also feature an interview by Anders Ericson with Frode Bakken, on the subject of *Free trade with library services – no “All clear” regarding GATs*.

Part three is a round up of recent publications which affect public libraries in the UK – *Framework for the future; The People’s Network; Building Better Library Services; Overdue – how to create a modern public library service*. This last title, by Charles Leadbetter of Demos, is particularly thought provoking. Its final sentence – “Libraries are sleep walking to disaster; it is time they woke up” – should give us all food for thought.

Our next issue, due out in January 2004, will include a report on the *Libraries in the Third World Forum* which is being held during the Culture and Development 3rd Congress in Havana, Cuba, between 9-12 June 2003. Participants at the Forum include ISC editor John Pateman, who will be taking part in a Round Table discussion on the theme of “libraries contribution to solidarity and social justice in a world of neo-liberal globalization”.

We are also exploring the possibility, with our sister organization in the US, the Progressive Librarians Guild, of producing a joint issue of ISC and PLG, possibly on the theme of how the so-called “war on terror” is affecting library and information services.

Corrections and amendments

The article by Jane Mackenzie (*The Quiet Storm*) which appeared in ISC 16, was originally published in *the Big Issue* no 501, Aug 12-18th 2002, pp.10-11. Jane Mackenzie is the Deputy Editor (News) of the *Big Issue*.

The ISC website states that the "Green Anarchist" ceased publication in 2000. This is not the case! The "Green Anarchist" is still being published and can be obtained from BCM 1715, London, WC1N 3XX, UK. The cover price of issue No. 67 Autumn 02 is "£1 / \$2, free to prisoners, £5,000 to cops"

Activism & Archivist.

Martyn Lowe

A few personal notes about just why I find it difficult to take an objective view upon this area of work.

Just yesterday I was talking to someone who is doing her doctorate upon a couple of people I knew and someone that I see from time to time.

This is something that is not new as an experience to me.

Just spend enough time within radical circles, or engage in activist activities, and you too can have the same kind of thing happen to you.

Be involved within any organisation for too long, & you too will find that many enquires about the organisation, or the people that were involved within it, are passed your way.

Today it is 17 years since I first become a volunteer within the International secretariat of the War Resisters International (WRI).

So increasingly I tend to be the one that enquires about the history of WRI are initially directed towards.

Now I can live with this, but it makes me increasingly realise that I really should get around to doing some oral history.

I am planning to engage upon this within the next half year. In part this is because of a realisation that I should do it at some stage, but by doing it now, then I can get on with the rest of my life, without feeling that it is how I'll have to spend my old age.

In any case - There is a lot of other things that I want to do in the future, & so I should clear things up so that I am able to get on with something new.

At least I have managed to keep my personal archives in order, & so that is something that I don't have to worry about.

So that's the background for you.

But - - -

there is a concept within the library world that the provision of information by librarians & information workers should be neutral.

Something that I take as essential to the work of those of us who work within Public Libraries.

Yet there is a double think to this. If I am ever to be asked to provide information about people I know or knew, then is it ever possible to provide neutral information?

For Example.

I'll give you an example of how this works for me.

From 1968 to 1972 I worked within a theatrical costumiers, which provided the costumes of the first Monty Python series.

Thus if I ever get asked about any aspects to the above, then it becomes very difficult for me to be neutral without some kind of personal background being added.

likewise - I knew the singer Alex Harvey.
- So - Ditto.

So here is my question for you all.

Do any of the readers of ISC find that they sometimes land up within the same situation, & how do they deal with it ?

I would be interested in hearing from them.

Martyn Lowe

December 15th 2002

"I am an Anarchist not because I believe Anarchism is the final goal, but because there is no such thing as a final goal."

— Rudolf Rocker, The London Years

Globalisation, libraries and information

Ruth Rikowski

Globalisation is a phenomenon that is pervading the world. Yet, what exactly is 'globalisation'? More accurately, it should be referred to as 'global capitalism'. 'Globalisation' has been defined in a variety of ways and some of these definitions have been highlighted in a report on 'Globalisation', which has been produced by the House of Lords Select Committee on Economic Affairs. The report refers to a cross-Government departmental memorandum, for example, which suggests that:

...in an economic context [globalisation] is normally understood to mean a process of increasing international interactions and accelerating international trade, capital and information flows [but that] globalisation can also be seen to have a political dimension, including the diffusion of global norms and values, the spread of democracy and the proliferation of treaties, such as international environment and human rights agreements. (Ev 1, p.1, in House of Commons report on Globalisation, 2002, p.12)

Meanwhile, it also refers to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) comments, which says that:

In general terms, globalisation describes the process of increasing economic integration among nations through cross-border flows of goods and resources together with the development of a complementary set of organisational structures to manage the associated network of economic activities. (Ev 1, p.360, in House of Commons report on Globalisation, 2002, p.13)

The House of Lords Select Committee concludes this section noting that it does not offer a simple definition of globalisation, but that:

...it is our view that the period of globalisation represents a new departure in world affairs. Partly this is to do with what has been called "the death of distance", assisted by the absolute and relative decline in transport costs...We have one world in an economic and cultural sense, which has not existed before. (House of Lords, 2002, p.18)

Thus, there is a clear recognition here that what we are witnessing and experiencing is something significantly different from what has taken place in the past.

Where then do libraries and information fit into this global scenario? The area that I have been focusing on in particular, in regard to globalisation, are the agreements that are being developed at the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The WTO is a powerful body that establishes rules for international trade. It has nearly 150 member countries, of which the UK is one (via the European Union that operates as a single entity). Many agreements are being developed at the WTO, and strengthened versions of these are due to come into effect in 2005. Two of these agreements are likely to have significant implications for libraries and information. One of these is the GATS (the General Agreement on Trade in Services), and the other is TRIPS (Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights). The GATS is about the liberalisation of trade in services, and therefore threatens the state-funded provision of libraries. I have written extensively about the GATS and have sought to raise awareness about this topic in a variety of ways (see, for example, Rikowski, 2001a, 2002a, 2002b and 2002c).

The TRIPS Agreement, on the other hand, is about the trading of intellectual property rights, and it is the copyright section that is particularly relevant for libraries and information. As the IFLA Committee on Copyright and other Legal Matters (CLM) says:

Of course, the most important type of intellectual property as far as libraries are concerned is copyright. (CLM, 2002)

The CLM also notes the need for a 'balanced' approach, and says that:

It is important to remember that copyright law exists for the benefit of society as a whole (CLM, 2002)

IFLA and EBLIDA (the European Bureau of Library Information and Documentation Association) are concerned about the likely implications of these agreements for libraries and information. As IFLA says:

There is growing evidence that WTO decisions, directly or indirectly, may adversely affect the operations and future development of library services, especially in the not-for-profit institutions (IFLA, 2001)

Conclusion

What is clear is that through the GATS library services could become internationally tradable commodities, and through the TRIPS the free flow of information – one of the cornerstones of an open information world – is under threat. Library and information workers should monitor both GATS and TRIPS closely in order to work through the consequences of these WTO agreements for their work and the values underpinning their practice. With these goals in view, I am giving talks on these issues at library and information events this year. Firstly, I spoke about TRIPS at the Library and Information Show on the 30th March. Secondly, I will be talking about GATS at the CILIP Umbrella Conference on the 5th July.

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Library privatisation: fact or fiction?

Ruth Rikowski

The friendly, inviting **local community public library**. Seemingly somehow removed from the glare of competition and the rat race. Deep down, I think we all cherish our public libraries. They offer the chance to gain a sense of the community spirit; to provide opportunities for leisure pursuits with their vast array

of novels (a welcome change from the TV and a Murdoch takeover); to provide free information for all; to provide the opportunity to hold meetings and debate issues, and to provide a place where people can think and be creative. It is a place for all the community – from toddlers, to school children, to students, to ordinary workers, to the unemployed, to the businessman, to mothers, to the unemployed, and to the pensioner. We all know this – the concept of the public library has been with us in Britain since 1850. Do we really want to see public libraries change into commercial, moneymaking enterprises, where the wants and needs of the local community get lost amongst the pound notes? Do we really want to lose the opportunity that the public library offers for ordinary people to be able to think and debate issues, to pursue various leisure pursuits and to obtain information? It might not be ideal, but what is round the corner, and in fact, is already staring us in the face is the business takeover of public libraries. The primary goal of these private operators is and must always be to make profits, which conflicts with goals about serving the wants and needs of the local community, caring for people and notions of equality and social justice.

The **GATS** – the **General Agreement on Trade in Services**. This agreement is becoming more widely known. It is about the liberalisation of trade in services, opening them all – public services included – to profit making ventures. The GATS is under the auspices of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) based in Geneva. The WTO is concerned with ‘regulating’ world trade and devising trade rules for its member states. The UK is a member through the European Union, along with nearly 150 other members.

We witness privatisation of our public services on almost a daily basis, but what has this got to do with the GATS? They are intrinsically linked: GATS paves the way to enable further and extended privatisation of services.

Are there any safe havens from this seemingly all-pervasive trend? We see the privatisation agenda all around us, with PFI, PPP, outsourcing and so on – infiltrating all our public services. Surely our friendly local, community, public libraries are safe? Not so, it seems.

Many examples can be given which show how private companies are already making inroads into our libraries. Instant Library Ltd, for example, are currently running the library service in the London Borough of Haringey. Haringey council failed its Best Value inspectorate for libraries. Best Value is being used as a mechanism to bring in private companies. As Angela Watson says in *Best Returns* (2001)

Under Best Value retaining library services in-house can only be justified where the authority demonstrates that there really are no other more efficient and effective ways of delivering the quality of service required. Library authorities should explore potential future providers and take steps to encourage them – to create a climate for competition that will enable the market to develop.

So, Best Value is being used as a mechanism to bring in the GATS – given that the GATS is about bringing in other suppliers, creating a climate of competition, paving the way and enabling the liberalisation of trade in services to take effect. Various other mechanisms are also being set in place, such as the Library Standards. Indeed, Library Standards and the Best Value regime are being used together as tools to introduce this climate of competition.

There are already companies that sell information on the web, such as Questia, NetLibrary and Ebrary. As Fox says Questia:

...sells information online directly to consumers the way amazon sells books online and the GAP sells clothes online. (Fox, 2001)

There are also various PFI schemes and these have been going on for some time now. The first PFI to incorporate construction and IT solutions was undertaken in Bournemouth and has recently provided Bournemouth with a new central library and ICT facilities across the whole branch network.

Then, there are ICT centres/Internet projects that are being set up in public libraries by private companies. An Internet project called Cybercity situated in Bath Central Library was run by a local company called GlobalInternet, for example. Income generation has also been going on for quite a long time now in libraries – selling postcards, memorabilia, pens, book marks etc and of course things like hiring videos and CDs are very much a taken-for-granted part of public libraries today. This commercialisation will enable the GATS to impact on public libraries, as the entrance of private capital into a public service moves it towards becoming an internationally tradable commodity under GATS imperatives.

Various library bodies and library associations are concerned about the implications of the WTO and the GATS for libraries and information. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), for example, notes that:

There is growing evidence that WTO decisions, directly or indirectly, may adversely affect the operations and future development of library services, especially in the not-for-profit institutions.

Leading on from this I attended the IFLA conference at Glasgow this August and organised a fringe meeting on the GATS, entitled *The Profit Virus: Globalisation, Libraries and Education*. There were speakers from the Canadian and Norwegian library associations, from the World Development Movement and from academics focusing on the connections between schools and the GATS and higher education and the GATS. I also spoke about the WTO/GATS Agenda for Libraries – with particular reference to public libraries in England. The meeting was well attended and there was a lot of interest in the subject. So, many librarians are concerned – not everyone is swimming along happily in the money tide.

The idea of seeing money being exchanged; the use of switch cards, visa cards, master cards; special offers; advertisements pervading our libraries – all this surely seems very alien to us – and yet this is the vision that haunts library services. Hidden money will also become more fashionable – micropayments. Micropayments is a method being developed whereby people pay for transactions they undertake on the Internet - transactions such as downloading and printing documents. Why has this not been done before? It is complicated, and there are concerns about security and trust. But many of these problems are starting to be overcome. StorageTek has written a White Paper about all this. They say:

Online products such as data are becoming a commodity, so why not...charge a small fee for them? (StorageTek, 2001)

Furthermore, David Slater, the Marketing Manager of StorageTek said in 2001:

Over the last eighteen months one of the most significant obstacles to making money from the Internet will be overcome. The lack of a trusted, cost-effective and convenient mechanism for users to pay for low value products and services has been one of the main reasons for the Internet's failure to deliver the online revenue envisaged. Micropayments...provide this missing link....

What do folks want from their local library - surely not another hyperactive, hard-selling, supermarket-type environment? Or is this what people want? We are sometimes led to believe that everyone today loves to consume, to buy, to parade his or her goods, and that this is 'where it is at'. Sure – it would be good if public libraries were used more. But will paying for their services make them more attractive? Introduce coffee, cakes, and other money-making gimmicks and libraries suddenly become more enticing? Or will people forget about books and libraries altogether instead? They might prefer to hire out a DVD from the local video shop or just download information from their computer at home. But the poor won't be able to afford to do that – the digital divide will increase, inequalities will increase. And what about the idea of discussing and debating issues in the local library – that will be all gone, unless groups pay for rooms at rates increasingly moving towards commercial ones. That in turn will decrease the chances of debating ideas for a better, a different, a fairer and a kinder world. If libraries do remain they will become something quite different – money-making enterprises where computers are likely to be the central attraction.

The local public library might never have been ideal, in the same way as our other public services are not ideal and need improving, but what is just round the corner is far worse. We must not be fooled by the rhetoric. Privatisation makes things worse – not better. Surely we need to try to stop this happening.

Why should anything be free when potentially money can be made out of it? This seems to be the dogma of the neo-liberal agenda. This is the scenario that is before us. And capitalism's quest is so all-pervasive that even if we think that no-one will want or know how to make money out of a public service, such as

libraries, that is not the end of the matter. The pro-capitalist agenda argues that people need to think harder about how to conjure up ways of making money out of libraries, and indeed, out of anything. 'It must be possible' - so says the logic of capitalism. Global capitalism – the great extension of capitalism – is heading towards the impossible goal of the commodification and marketisation of all that surrounds us.

Let us take stock of the situation while there is still time – before the virtually irreversible GATS comes into effect.

THE POWER LIES WITHIN OURSELVES – our free public library service is surely worth preserving.

The GATS will be coming into effect before we know it – we need to raise awareness and try to do something about it before it is too late.

For more information about GATS and Libraries see Rory Litwin's website which provides links to articles on the web about GATS and libraries throughout the world at: <http://libr.org/GATS>

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Ruth Rikowski, London, 18th September 2002

STILL AT YOUR SERVICE? GATS, PRIVATISATION AND PUBLIC SERVICES IN THE UK

ATTAC GATS CONFERENCE

Held on November 16th 2002, at the London School of Economics

Approximately 70 people attended. People were very interested in the whole topic and there were some good discussions throughout the day.

Opening Session

Chaired by **Dr. Glenn Rikowski**, ATTAC London and Senior Lecturer, University College Northampton

Introductory talk by **Ruth Rikowski**, ATTAC London, Visiting Lecturer, University of Greenwich and South Bank University and Book Reviews Editor for 'Managing Information'

'GATS and privatisation – issues and questions of the conference'

Ruth provided some background information about the WTO and the GATS and considered some of the terminology in the GATS agreement, such as '**bottom up**' and '**top down**', '**most favoured nation**', '**national treatment**', '**transparency**' and '**market access**'. She referred to the ambiguity in regard to the meaning of 'services' in the GATS document.

She emphasised her belief that there is a need for a concerted effort to raise awareness about the GATS in the UK. Furthermore, that if people in the UK realised that their public services were really under threat from a corporate takeover, then perhaps people would come out of the political fog that they currently appear to be in, re-engage with politics and want to do something about it all.

A very good discussion followed from this talk. Someone suggested, for example, that there might not be anything wrong with private companies running our public services if they run them in a more efficient manner. People really started to think about some of the main, crucial issues, which was very encouraging.

Niaz Alam, Vice-Chair of War on Want

'Globalisation, privatisation and world poverty'

Niaz is Vice Chair of War on Want and a trustee on the Council Management of War on Want. A solicitor by background, Niaz is Head of Social Issues at the Ethical Investment Research Service (EIRIS).

War on Want was founded in 1951 by amongst others Harold Wilson and Victor Gollancz as a pioneering charity that has always sought to work in solidarity with the poor directly and address the underlying causes of world poverty. It has been at the forefront of many of the debates around developing world issues and it

also calls for the introduction of a Tobin tax on currency speculation. War on Want works with progressive governments and organisations to find solutions to the failure of the world economic system to deliver a more equal distribution of wealth. It seeks to use the opportunities presented by globalisation (e.g. the Internet and linking with like-minded people) to provide more such equality.

Niaz's Talk

Niaz spoke about world poverty and said that when workers organise they become very powerful factors for trying to improve living and working conditions. He said that today, poverty means looking at globalisation, and at aspects such as the liberalisation of investment, capital and trade. 28 million people in Africa, for example, are on the starvation line. China expects to lose 25 million jobs, due to the WTO. He said that we need to make globalisation work for the many, not just the few, and this can only be done by organising and empowering the mass of the people internationally. War on Want works with different trade unions, to try to address this problem. He said that he is not anti-globalisation, but that it is going in the wrong direction.

Benjamin Geer, Co-ordinator of ATTAC London

'What is ATTAC?'

Ben provided some basic information about what ATTAC is, the origins and philosophy of ATTAC and some further information about the London branch. He encouraged people to look at the ATTAC website and to join - www.attac.org.uk.

ATTAC is about "placing the democratic principles of governance before the interests of international finance." (Kohonen and Kotkowska, in *The Chartist*, Jan/Feb 2003, p. 15).

WORKSHOPS

After lunch, there were 8 different workshops and people could choose to go to two different workshops. The workshops were:

Workshop One

'Legal implications of the GATS'

Dr. Markus Krajewski, ATTAC London and Lecturer in International Law at Kings College, London

Workshop leaders comments

This working group was quite popular. There were between 15 and 25 people and they discussed matters like GATS and public services, market access and national treatment obligations.

Workshop Two

'Private sector involvement in the NHS'

Dr. Sally Ruane, UK GATS Network and Lecturer in Health Policy at De Montfort University

Sally's research interests and publications are in health, and public/private boundaries, PFI and PPPs, GATS and anti-privatisation. She is actively involved in the campaign against privatisation and organised a national conference on this in 2001.

Outline of talk

Sally gave a presentation on a number of policies, which together seem set to transform the nature of the NHS from an essentially socialised model of health care provision to a mixed economy and marketised model. Policies considered include the concordat with the private health sector, PFI and Foundation Hospitals. She discussed the implications of these policies and forms of resistance.

Workshop leaders comments

Sally's workshop was well-attended and there was a good discussion. Sally has contacted various people at the workshop, leading on from this.

Workshop Three

'Language and Ideology'

Sylvie Gosme, ATTAC London, working at a UN agency in Bruxelles.
Former student at SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies)

Outline of talk

Sylvie is interested in understanding the effect of the GATS in our everyday lives. She is also interested in understanding how its proponent managed to 'sell' it, especially to people that would get more harm than benefit from it. So she has studied some aspects of neo-liberal ideology and in particular how it has set the terms of debate about economic issues and the role of the state.

Workshop leaders comments

My workshop was about Language and Ideology, and attracted around 20 people. My presentation was about the dominance of neo-liberal ideology in the

public discourse, and how many different concepts and ideas, originating from neo-classical economics (the economic theory underlying neo-liberal ideology), were presented as natural laws or received wisdom. This has helped to ensure that the ideology is dominant in the majority of people's mind, and this induced apathy or nihilism rather than constructive criticism from those who are experiencing the negative impact of policies based on this ideology.

The audience responded positively to my presentation. They seemed to enjoy being given a clear but not simplistic, theoretical critic of ideas derived from neo-classical economics, and this suggests that there is a great potential for a popular education campaign about economics. This can include explaining concepts that are often thrown at them as magical formula, demonstrating that the apparent logic of neo-classical theories is often deceptive, and showing that the private sector is not necessarily more efficient than the state. This would be directed towards those who have the intellectual tools to grasp those criticisms but who have never had the opportunity to be exposed to them before.

However, the first feeling that emerged in the discussion was a feeling of helplessness. Campaigning successfully against the GATS seems achievable, but how can we reverse two decades of neo-liberal propaganda? How can we change people's vision of the world, which has been so deeply rooted by this propaganda? I said that even I, who had studied the theoretical shortcomings of neo-liberal ideology, still intuitively started from its premise, since I have been exposed all my life to a vulgarised version of neo-classical economics as it is so pervasive in the media. Also, that I found it always more difficult to remember a non- neo-classical economics argument than a neo-classical. Ben Geer, the co-ordinator of ATTAC London, as well as a member of the audience, responded to this by recalling that neo-liberal ideology was in the same marginal position 30 years ago as its critics are today, and that a long-term effort might eventually be very successful. Also, he talked about ATTAC working to build an alternative scientific body of theory, and of the creation of its scientific committee that was there to give ATTAC members the intellectual tools to fight against neo-liberal ideology. The workshop itself had no concrete outcome, but a few people expressed interest in ATTAC's activities, and that this could become a focus for work in this direction.

This workshop was run once, and alternated with Francois's workshop.

Workshop Four

'Privatisation of security'

Dr. Francois Ogliaro, ATTAC London, Research Assistant at Kings College

Outline of talk

With twice as many staff (120,000 vs 240,000) and 3 billions £turnover the private security industry has become a major actor of the policing policy and law enforcements. The Private Security Industry (PSIA) created in 2002 by the government retains all the characteristics of a self-regulating body similar to those that have failed in the past 10 years to fix the historical problems of the industry: over representation of people with 'dubious character'.

According to the Police federation, the privatisation of the police also takes the shape of a cheap CPO (Community Police Officer). Police will be less trained and less paid (1/3 less pay).

Workshop leaders comments

The workshop was well-attended and there was a good discussion.

This workshop only ran once, and was alternated with Sylvie's workshop

Workshop Five

'The Pension Crisis'

Hugh Lowe, National Pensioners Convention

Hugh Lowe is a Campaigning Pensioner and a member of the Research Committee of the National Pension Convention. He has also been a long time trade unionist.

National Pensions Convention (NPC) was formed in 1979 to act as the umbrella organisation of the pensioners' movement, throughout the country. Its affiliated groups include many national bodies and federations, associations of retired trade unionists, as well as hundreds of local and regional pensioner campaign groups. The NPC's main objective is to promote the welfare and interests of all pensioners, as a way of securing dignity, respect and financial security in retirement.

Outline of talk

Discussed privatisation of pensions and the power and influence of large corporations in regard to pension schemes.

Workshop Six

'Marketisation of higher education'

Dr. Les Levidow, Critical Academic Network and Open University

Les is a researcher and an activist. He is centrally involved in the Critical Academic Network. Les is a Research Fellow in the Centre for Technology Strategy at the Open University and he is Managing Editor of 'Science as Culture'. He has written on neoliberal policy in relation to higher education as well as on critical studies of GM crops, bioethics, international development and environmental learning.

Outline of talk

The UK government is pushing higher education into forms of marketization which would supposedly help universities here to become internationally competitive. UK Vice-Chancellors have been promoting such an agenda, e.g. by adopting business models of organization and performance criteria. These measures undermine education as a public good and provide practical models for implementing GATS. (See the article, 'Marketizing Higher Education: Neoliberal Strategies and Counter-Strategies', <http://attac.org.uk/attac/html/view-document.vm?documentID=138>)

Workshop leaders comments

Discussion included these points:

Marketization is being justified by ideological terms, e.g. defining quality as fitness for profits, defining the 'knowledge economy' in terms of measurable individual skills, in turn defined as 'human capital', while ignoring the social skills and interactions necessary. Marketization intersects with several processes -- e.g., increasing access to HE, student indebtedness, modularization -- though does so because the latter are instrumentalized for that purpose, not for inherent reasons. Various pressures upon lecturers can lead to standardized curricula and student evaluation, regardless of their views about quality education. Effective opposition depends upon credible alternatives for funding HE and for a critical pedagogy.

Workshop Seven

'The business takeover of schools'

Dr. Glenn Rikowski, ATTAC London, Senior Lecturer, University College Northampton

The talk provided examples of the business takeover of schools and the types of business involvement in schools: Private Finance Initiative (PFI), outsourcing, Education Action Zones, and other examples and forms of for-profit operations. The legislative framework for the business takeover of schools was then examined: the Green Paper, White Paper, Education Bill and Education Act 2002. These developments were related to the GATS. The relationship between the EU Schedule of Commitments for education on GATS and business involvement in schools: i.e., such involvement opens up the relevant education services to GATS. Finally, some of the ways in which trade unions, student organisations and education activists were responding to these developments were discussed.

Workshop leaders comments

The debate in the session was wide ranging and interesting. One of the participants was an AUT researcher who had been examining the GATS. The discussion explored the ways that businesses can make profits from schools, Education Act 2002 (especially the sections on schools becoming companies), the fightback (in the trade unions and amongst student organisations) against GATS and examples that the participants were familiar with in various parts of the country.

Workshop Eight

Ruth Rikowski, ATTAC London, Visiting Lecturer, University of Greenwich and South Bank University and Book Reviews Editor, Managing Information

‘The GATS, libraries and privatisation’

Ruth discussed papers that she has written on ‘The WTO/GATS Agenda for Libraries’, linking the GATS to concrete examples in the UK of library privatisation, focusing in particular, on the public libraries. She explained, for example, how Haringey public library service is currently being run by a private company, called Instant Library Ltd, because Haringey council failed its Best Value Report for its library service, and so Instant Library were brought in to try to ‘solve’ the problem. She described how Best Value is being used as a mechanism to introduce a climate of competition, and how this fits in neatly with the GATS; indeed, it is seen to be one of the ‘national faces of the GATS’ or a mechanism/facilitator, to enable the GATS to take effect.

Workshop leaders comments

An interesting discussion followed, and some participants spoke about the situation in regard to Havering libraries, where the council were proposing to shut down all Havering public libraries, and build new ones elsewhere with PFI. Various 'odd' reasons were given for doing this – e.g. that the library was not near enough to a shopping centre. At the current time, they did not go ahead with the plan, but they could always re-introduce it at a later date.

Events following on from workshop

Francis K Krause attended this workshop and spoke about the situation in Havering libraries. He contacted me afterwards, and provided some more information about this.

He forwarded a Discussion Paper, entitled 'Stop the asset stripping of London's Public Libraries' (5th Dec 2002). The document said:

“London's public libraries are under threat from asset-strippers and property developers due to a plethora of private finance initiatives. Havering Council, for example, submitted a PFI bid last month, which, if accepted, would have resulted in five of its ten purpose-built premises being demolished. Fortunately, the bid was turned down, but in all probability an equally hideous PFI scheme will be dreamed up in twelve months time. Meanwhile, creeping privatisation is already under way. In Havering, for instance, JP Morgan Flemming provides Hornchurch Branch Library with educational workbooks for very young children. It's a matter of time before the arrangement is expanded to include older age groups, thus producing a lock-in monopoly.

So how should we mount a campaign to save London's libraries?

Under the Local Government Finance Act 1982, local authorities must have their accounts audited annually by independent accountants. Section 17 of the Act also gives members of the public the right to examine and make copies of the accounts together with any related documents such as deeds, contracts, bills, vouchers and receipts. In addition, electors may challenge the accounts and question the auditor if a discrepancy or breach of legal duty is suspected.

By inspecting the deeds of each branch library within a local authority area, one can begin to audit everything relating to that site. Examples of factors, which should be verified, as follows:

- the present valuation of the land and building(s)
- the date of the valuation and whether this figure is up-to-date
- the Valuation Officers

- the Councillors responsible
- the existence of a council that could prevent the property from being sold or restrict its sale.”

Plenary session

Chaired by **Dr. Francois Ogliaro**

Kat Fletcher, National Union of Students (NUS), National Womens Officer. Kat has also been involved, as a member of the NUS National Executive Committee, in the formation of the NUS GATS policy

‘Education is not for sale’

The National Union of Students was founded in 1922. Today NUS represents 5 million students across the UK, providing them with a united voice, excellent benefits and helpful research and information.

Outline of talk

Kat spoke passionately about some of the things that are happening in higher education and how we need to link this to the GATS. She also spoke about some of the work of the NUS.

Emanuele Lobina, Public Services International Research Unit (PSRU) Emanuele is a Research Fellow at PSIRU. He is also a consultant in Globalisation, Water Supply and Sanitation, Arezzo Italy and has co-authored a series of reports on the privatisation of the water market worldwide.

‘Privatisation of the water market’

PSIRU – the Public Services International Research Unit is based at University of Greenwich. PSIRU researches privatisation and restructuring of public services around the world, with special focus on water, energy, waste management, and healthcare. It produces a series of reports on specific aspects of privatisation and restructuring, and maintains an extensive database. This core database is financed by Public Services International (PSI), the global confederation of public services trade unions.

Outline of talk

Problems with water privatisation in transition and developing countries.
Policy implications – e.g. role of multilateral agencies and implications for policy making in transition and developing countries
Alternatives to water privatisation/strengthening public water operations

Dr. Markus Krajewski, ATTAC London and Lecturer in International Law at Kings College, London

‘Summary of the meeting and further action’

Markus said how pleased he was with how the whole day went in general, that there had been lots of fruitful discussions and that hopefully we can now build on this, and take these issues forward.

Discussion - 5.00-5.30pm

There was a lively discussion and a wide variety of questions were asked.

Stall

There was a stall at the back for leaflets and books. Many different leaflets were taken and some books were sold.

Compiled by Ruth Rikowski, January 2003
Email: rikowski@tiscali.co.uk

Free trade with library services? - No "all clear" regarding GATS

Anders Ericson interviews Frode Bakken, President of the Norwegian Library Association

Originally printed in Norwegian in the journal Bok og bibliotek No. 1, 2003.

The international GATS agreement is about the trading of various services, such as library services, and this has long been a headache for President Frode Bakken of the Norwegian Library Association. After a recent meeting with the WTO in Geneva he is only slightly comforted.

Most people having kept up with the developments of GATS - *General Agreement on Trade in Services* - react with disbelief; how can anybody ever make money out of library services? But nevertheless several countries, including USA and Japan, have put forward requests to export library services in the future. Countries may guard against being exposed to competition in certain services. However, one cannot count on exemptions forever, not even for what are regarded as traditional public services. And no one should be in any doubt: the clear long term goal for GATS is international liberalisation and free trade for as many services as possible.

Mr. Frode Bakken was one of the representatives of the European library association, EBLIDA, at the important meeting in Geneva in December, 2002. He is the co-ordinator of the EBLIDA WTO working group. At this meeting the library community (EBLIDA and IFLA) had their first close encounter with the main force behind the GATS agreement, the WTO - The World Trade Organisation. The library representatives sent, in advance, a document with several concrete questions. One of the problems with the WTO and GATS has been a lack of information, and the information that has been given has been vague and incoherent. But this time EBLIDA wanted some clear answers.

AE: What are your impressions after the meeting? Are library services likely to become part of the agreement and thus opening up an international market for such services?

FB: In my opinion this is still possible. But it is not very likely in the present situation. Mainly, because you do not make much money from running libraries. Of course you'll make more money on health and education, partly because services that used to be public are here exposed to private investments and later to full privatisation. But at the same time there is no reason for librarians to put this issue aside. It is thought-provoking that when WTO was established in 1995, thirteen countries had made commitments in their schedules. Today the number has reached eighteen. However it is important to remember that the agreement itself only tells what is possible, while every single country commits itself and decides whether to open fully or partly its markets for foreign investors and give them the same conditions as domestic investors and companies.

AE: At the Geneva meeting EBLIDA put forward a question about the definition of public services in the GATS agreement. In the GATS it refers to "services ... supplied neither on a commercial basis, nor in competition with one or more service suppliers". Will the fate of library services depend on national interpretations?

FB: It is obvious after the thorough conversations with the WTO representatives that there is no such authoritative definition or interpretation. And a lot of the problems about the WTO are how to make the countries agree on common interpretations of various questions in the agreements, not yet agreed upon. For

the same reason library supporters cannot claim that these expressions in the GATS agreement give any protection whatsoever in various situations.

AE: Thus Norwegian libraries and the libraries of even more liberalised countries might get different conditions when library services are put into the free market?

FB: Yes, the present government with its own opinion on WTO issues may have one policy, and another government, for example, after an election, may take a different opinion and allow an opening up of market powers to a greater extent.

AE: Some parts of what are usually considered to be public library services may in the future be included in another part of the GATS agreement; i.e. *On-line Database and Retrieval* under *Communication Services*. The library delegation asked whether e.g. "Ask-A-Librarian services" will be exposed to international competition in accordance with this definition.

FB: We were given no confirmation to this.

AE: The library environment put forward a GATS scenario where a company gets access to "the library market" and demands the same conditions as public suppliers, such as municipal subsidies. The local government then has to choose between promising the same subsidies, or to lower the level of subsidies to avoid an expansion of total subsidies, or to solve this problem by removing all subsidies. Is this still a possible scenario?

FB: According to GATS regulations and under certain conditions this may happen. In my opinion this was confirmed during the Geneva meeting. But it is still not very likely today.

AE: In your opinion one cannot make much money from library activities, but private companies do invest considerable amounts in, for example, digital reference services. There is in fact a gradual privatisation, and it is surely possible that library services could be exposed to free trade?

FB: This is no doubt a possibility, but I find it very difficult to say anything sensible about scenarios here. We need stronger efforts from more parties, especially in international library circles, e.g. IFLA or EBLIDA. In my opinion we need an expert study on the global library market and on relevant scenarios to establish a platform for a new policy.

Finally we must remember that a lot of changes in the wake of WTO are related to situations of give and take. Agriculture, for example, is a very important issue in the WTO negotiations in general. Frode Bakken concluded by saying that big changes may occur due to compromise, when one country leaves its principles in one field to prosper in another field.

Framework for the future: or the present?

John Pateman

Framework for the Future: libraries, learning and information in the next decade, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, February 2003

One thing which forcibly struck me when reading the government's *Framework for the Future* (DCMS, 2003) was how familiar much of its content seemed. All of the pictures and stories about best practice appeared to me to be nothing more than descriptions of what a good public library service should be today – not in ten years time. And yet the Framework is about Libraries, Learning and Information in the next decade. The vision takes us to 2013 but the contents are very much rooted in 2003.

My concern is that many Chief Librarians will draw great comfort from the Framework because they can easily produce evidence to show how they are already doing it. And the last thing we need is comfortable Chief Librarians; what we need is a Framework which will make Chief Librarians uncomfortable enough to have to start transforming their library services so that they can better meet the needs of their communities.

Tessa Blackstone puts great emphasis on this issue of libraries meeting community needs. In her introduction she talks about library services which are “adapted to local need” and her vision of the library service is that it should be “able to respond to the needs of society”. But the Framework which follows is not a strategy for meeting needs: it is evolutionary when it should be revolutionary; it is modernising when it should be transforming; and it is deregulatory when it should be interventionist.

The Framework is based on a number of fundamental myths and misconceptions about public libraries. It is claimed that they are “open to all” when all the research evidence suggests that they are only actively used by 30% of the population; two out of three library users are middle class; and libraries are massively underused by Black communities, Travellers, refugees, asylum seekers, the homeless and other marginalised groups. Libraries are used most by those who need them least; and they are used least by those who need them most.

Another myth is that libraries offer “neutral welcoming community space” and they are “run by committed staff”. The experience of some library users does not support these contentions. Some libraries are seen as threatening and intimidating environments where systems, procedures, staff attitudes and behaviours are positively off putting. These issues are not addressed in the Framework. The view is that a few more computers, some building improvements and staff training will solve the problem. It will not. What is needed is a radical

transformation of public libraries along the lines of *Open to All? The Public Library and Social Exclusion* (Resource, 2000).

Having made these initial criticisms, there is much in the Framework to be welcomed and applauded. It notes a “tendency amongst libraries to focus on current users rather than non-users, and patterns of opening hours which do not match the needs of would-be users”. And there is recognition that “there has been little turnover of the workforce at senior level, promotion opportunities are limited and there is an urgent need to develop a new generation of library leaders”.

The Framework also makes a brave attempt to put some flesh on the bare bones of the 1964 Public Libraries Act. We now know that the government’s definition of a “comprehensive and efficient” public library service is one which:

- promotes reading and informal learning
- provides access to digital skills and services including e-government
- tackles social exclusion, builds community identity and develops citizenship

In terms of books, learning and reading it is time that the issues of what books are selected by public libraries, and by whom, should be addressed. It is not surprising that only 59% of users find the book they come to borrow or use, when book selection is dominated by white middle class professional librarians choosing books from the arid stocks of multi national companies. Book selection should be thrown open to the community; the books are bought with their money, and they should have a big say in what is purchased.

With regard to digital citizenship, this has received a huge boost through the People’s Network and the New Opportunity Fund. But care should be taken that the People’s Network does not become a free public subsidy for middle class users seeking to reduce their Internet bills. The service should be focussed and targeted on those who need it most, including those who do not have access at home. No library authority should be allowed to charge people for using the Network, and filtering software and Acceptable User Policies should not be used to censor access and create a second class service.

But the real opportunities for public libraries are to be found in the third strand of the Framework: libraries have the potential to play an important role in the promotion of community and civic values. Libraries must become relevant to the needs of the communities they serve. Failure to do so will threaten their very survival. Libraries must survey and review community needs, focussing particularly on the needs of the people who do not currently use them. The success of the Framework should be measured by how many new and different people start to use their local libraries.

The Framework will not be delivered by throwing more money at libraries or making sure that Chief Librarians are first or second tier officers. In the past when Chief Librarians had the power and the resources to meet community needs, they still failed to do so. Instead, as the Framework says, library authorities must “look critically at how they use their existing resources and arrive at decisions locally about the balance of priorities”. Where this approach has been taken, in places like Leicester and Merton, the library service has been radically transformed.

One final criticism – the Framework is heavy on carrots but light on sticks. Public libraries have been reluctant to change for 150 years. The introduction of Annual Library Plans and Public Library Standards were a big move in the right direction. For the first time there was some real scrutiny of public library policies, practices and performance. Proof that they were effective could be found in the high level of whingeing and complaining about them by Chief Librarians and professional staff. If the Framework is to be delivered we need an Office for the Improvement of Public Libraries (Oflib) with the same powers of monitoring, inspection and intervention as Ofsted.

The People's Network, A Turning Point for Public Libraries

John Pateman

This report by Peter Brophy about the impact of the People's Network on the use of public libraries makes some rather large claims.

"A quiet revolution...is taking place in cities, towns and villages across the UK."

"Lives are being changed for the better in many different ways."

"Communities are enriched and social barriers are breached."

Unfortunately there is not much evidence of this actually happening in this scanty (20 page) report. There is much wishful thinking but not enough evidence to suggest that "particular weight (is) being given to the needs of groups of people who have to date been under represented as Internet users".

Given that the People's Network is funded by the Government on the basis that libraries will provide free access to the Internet, it is somewhat surprising to be told that "in 80% of public libraries... Internet access is free". What about the other 20%? How much are they charging and what for?

On a relatively small sample (86 out of 210 public library authorities) we are told that up to 80% of People's Network users have never before used the Internet and people who had stopped going to the public library have been attracted back for the following reasons:

- Learning - we are told that library staff are very encouraging and approachable in all respects and that libraries have a friendly helpful atmosphere. This has not been borne out by other research such as Open to All? Public Libraries and Social Exclusion. (Resource, 2000)
- Finding work
- Personal identity - This report is obsessed with age "Mrs V at the age of 90 is our oldest lady client"; "One 91 year old man came into a public library in Sussex"; "(One user) is 72 and until recently has never clicked a mouse"; "X, age 60, and recovering alcoholic, had never touched a computer in his life". Why should it be such a surprise that old people want to learn a new skill?
- Community enrichment
- Social Inclusion - In terms of social exclusion (not inclusion!) the emphasis is entirely on disability. It seems that installing screen magnification, text to speech output and alternatives to standard mouse and keyboard are the extent of most library efforts to tackle social exclusion using the People's Network.
- Culture and creativity

A key question is whether or not new users are being attracted by the new facilities. There is a well-established correlation between ownership of a computer and social class. The report states that "although there is as yet no conclusive statistical evidence, there are indications that the People's Network is attracting individuals from these segments (social grades D and E) of the population". The question needs to be asked whether and how library authorities are gathering information regarding use of the People's Network by social class and how they are targeting and managing the Network to maximise use by socially excluded groups and individuals.

In terms of use and access policy there is much emphasis placed on "misuse of Internet access" and how offenders should be "caught and dealt with immediately". It seems that librarians are using Acceptable Use Policies (AUP) to police what people can see on the Internet. Approximately 75% of authorities have also installed filtering software to prevent access to "unsuitable material, and a number have taken a walled garden approach as far as young people are concerned - this in effect gives access to selected sites rather than to the whole Internet".

Predominantly white middle class librarians are deciding who can see what on the Internet, in the same way that they decide who can read which books. This creates a two tier service - Middle Class users who have the Internet at home can look at any sites they like; Working Class users who use the People's Network only have selected access to Internet websites.

Woe betide those Internet users who contravene the AUP. A typical policy states "users are warned the first time anything unsuitable is accessed, banned for a

month if caught for a second time and banned for at least 6 months if it happens again. In extreme cases the police would be informed". Are these draconian policies really going to encourage widespread use of the People's Network?

The People's Network is being presented as a turning point for public libraries. It certainly has the potential to do this "through a combination of clear vision, innovation, appropriate investment and strategic management". Whether this is happening is another question and another assessment of the impact of the People's Network should be carried out to evaluate whether it truly is "reaching into parts of society which have until now been by passed or at the very least under represented... (and is)... removing the barriers to participation in the information society".

Building Better Library Services John Pateman

Building Better Library Services, Audit Commission, London, 52 pages, ISBN 1862403511, £18.00

"Provide more of the books and information services that people want."

"Improve access by opening at times that suit people."

"Ensure that services are easy and pleasant to use."

These are three of the recommendations made by the Audit Commission in its report *Building Better Library Services* (1). None of these recommendations appear to be either controversial or earth shattering. Why then did this report cause such a furore when it was published? I think the answer lies in two places; the image of the public library in the mass media; and the mindset of Chief Librarians.

The fact that public libraries are in decline is indisputable. Since 1992/93 visits have fallen by 17% and loans by almost one quarter. 23% fewer people are using libraries for borrowing than just three years ago. The knee jerk reaction to these figures from Chief Librarians is "what do you expect? Our funds have been cut and so we cannot continue to provide the same level of service." It is true that spending on books is down by one third since 1992/93 and 9% fewer libraries are open for 30 or more hours per week than in 1992/93. But within this story of declining resources there is another story - how are existing resources being used to meet community needs?

Only 30% of the population use libraries for borrowing books or other items. This is in comparison with the 73% of the Cuban population that uses their library system. Of the 30% of UK library users 2 out of 3 are middle class and predominantly white. Little or no effort has been made by public libraries to

reach out to that 70% of their communities who do not use their services. This includes socially excluded groups and individuals such as Travellers, the Homeless, Refugees and Asylum Seekers and the Black Community.

Library managers do not understand the needs of these socially excluded communities because of their white middle class backgrounds. In London, for example, 25% of the population is Black but of the 33 Chief librarians, all of them are white. This problem has been identified by a number of earlier reports, for example Public Libraries Ethnic Diversity & Citizenship (2), Libraries for All (3) and Open to All? (4). All of these reports suggest that public libraries need to undergo a radical transformation if they are to meet the needs of their diverse communities.

Building Better Library Services echoes the recommendations of these earlier reports when it suggests, for example: "Building awareness among non users of the services that libraries offer", and "Building the understanding of what users and non users want and need."

The report presents some interesting user and non-user views of libraries. Users and non-users share many concerns although non-users want to see more radical changes in the way that libraries operate. Lapsed users also have some interesting points of view;

"They never have new books or up to date ones in the library, and the ones that are there, they are a bit kind of twee, and you think they have been chosen by the librarians."

"If I take my two year old in there she is not quiet and I think "get her out quick or I will have everybody moaning". So I would not take her in there because it is hard to keep her quiet."

"I do think that too many libraries and particularly ones that I have been in, the librarians have made it quite clear that they know everything and we know bugger all."

It needs to be recognised that there is a significant minority of non-users who feel they will never use libraries in the future. In a study in a County Council, for example, over one quarter of non-users said nothing would persuade them to use libraries.

However, there still remains a large number of non-users who could be attracted to using libraries - though this is likely to require some radical changes. People say they want libraries to be modern and welcoming. Raising awareness of what is available, having up to date stock, additional facilities, providing more information and extending opening hours may have some effect on increasing usage, and should increase satisfaction amongst users.

In addition staff attitudes and behaviour need to be challenged as well as working practices to increase efficiency and improve services. Libraries must become

less building based and more focused on meeting the needs of their communities through outreach work and targeted service delivery.

Libraries hold an important place in people's hearts but they are losing their place in people's lives. If current trends in usage continue, libraries will increasingly become a minority service - driven less by the desire to access books and information than by the needs of those who cannot afford to go elsewhere.

To address these problems, Councils need to challenge how and why the service is delivered, working with staff, members and the public to build an explicit vision for the future of the service. Our target must be 100% use by all sections of the community.

References

- (1) Building Better Library Services, Audit Commission, 2002
- (2) Public Libraries, Ethnic Diversity and Citizenship, Patrick Roach & Marlene Morrison, University of Warwick, 1998
- (3) Libraries For All, DCMS, 1999
- (4) Open to All?, Resource, 2000

Overdue: How to create a modern public library service, by Charles Leadbeater, Laser Foundation, April 2003, ISBN 84180 109 7, £3, 35 pages

John Pateman

Britain's public libraries are in serious trouble. Audit Commission figures published in May 2002 show that library visits have fallen by 17% and book loans by almost a quarter since 1992. With 149 library authorities in England and Wales, the service is fragmented and difficult to modernise.

Charles Leadbeater, who acted as an advisor to the government's libraries framework strategy published in February 2003, argues that a National Library Development Agency (NLDA) is required to oversee the development of a service that meets the needs of a knowledge economy.

A national agency would unite the statutory responsibilities for libraries distributed across central government departments, including the Department of Education and Skills and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Service renewal starts by providers being held to account against clear standards. Libraries are meant to meet national standards set by DCMS, but failure to uphold these standards results in drift.

Public libraries also face a shortage of management talent as a core of senior management recruited 20 or 30 years ago is on the verge of retiring. There is little training or professional development for staff.

A national libraries agency would not run the service from the centre, but coordinate the network of libraries whose strength comes from their roots in local communities. Library services should develop centrally accessible “hubs”, which combine leisure and learning.

Initiatives which could be devised at a national level but implemented locally to help reconnect library services to their local communities might include:

- making new mothers automatically library members and inviting them to reading groups at libraries, nurseries or Sure Start centres before their babies’ first birthday;
- creating after school homework clubs based in libraries, which could develop into weekend and summer work clubs. These would be run as joint ventures with education departments;
- developing reading groups for teenagers, single people, retired people and household readers. Every “hub” library should support at least 20 reading groups.

Functions of a national libraries development agency would include:

- setting national standards to judge public library performance;
- overseeing workforce development, working with local authorities and regional groupings of library services;
- investing in innovation through a “transformation fund” which would enable local authorities to produce development funds and, in some cases, providing bridging funds to help with implementation;
- acting as a broker to buy access to online content and databases on behalf of all library services, and operating as a bulk purchaser with publishers.

Charles Leadbetter is a writer and consultant. He has advised government on innovation and the knowledge economy, and has published numerous pamphlets with Demos. This pamphlet is essential reading for all public library stakeholders. It is well produced, attractive and punchy to read. Its final sentence – “Libraries are sleepwalking to disaster: it’s time they woke up” – should give us all food for thought.